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Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, April 10, 2007

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Cuts threaten welfare goals

Tuesday, April 10, 2007

By Sharon Emery

Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Charged with getting the last of mid-Michigan's welfare clients working and off cash assistance, Doug Stites posits a sticky dilemma:

"If a mother is worried about where she's going to sleep that night, she's not listening to us when we're telling her how to write a resume," Stites recently told the House Families and Children's Services Committee.

Homelessness is just one of the problems facing Michigan's remaining welfare cases -- some 88,000, down from 225,000 a decade ago, said Stites, president and CEO of Capital Area Michigan Works!, a public-private partnership that provides work-force training. The state contracts with the agency to get welfare clients in Ingham, Clinton and Eaton counties on the job and off the dole.

While welfare reform succeeded in moving most recipients off cash assistance, those who remain usually need more than a training program and some direction. Once they find a job, 60 percent of long-term recipients return to welfare, most within six months. The so-called "hard-core unemployed" are straining county agencies statewide.

"We've had great success in getting people into the work force," the Michigan Department of Human Services' Donald Mussen told committee members. "We have not had great success in keeping people in the work force."

About 13,400 families have been on welfare more than four years. Of those, 97 percent are single parents with children receiving a monthly cash grant of \$489 for a family of three. Starting Oct. 1, the clock starts ticking on a 48-month state time limit on benefits for individual recipients of cash assistance.

With states facing federal financial sanctions if they don't get more of their welfare clients working, Michigan is battling to increase its work-participation rate of about 24 percent. The state's current federal target is 27.7 percent, although ultimately the feds want 50 percent of recipients working.

To that end, a three-tier set of sanctions kicks in this month for Family Independence Program (FIP) recipients who do not meet work requirements. Republican lawmakers pushed the plan for several years before it was signed into law by Gov. Jennifer Granholm late last year.

Benefits are cut for 90 days the first time recipients fail to meet work requirements; they're cut another 90 days the second time; and the third time it's a 12-month cutoff.

Single parents with one or more children under age 6 must spend 20 hours per week in work-related activities; single parents with no children under 6 have to put in 30 hours.

Two-parent families not using federally funded day care have to work 35 hours a week; two-parent families using federally funded day care must work 55 hours.

Education programs count as work. But reduced funding of adult education programs makes it all the trickier to meet the federal work rules, since Michigan also has one of the highest jobless rates in the country.

"It's especially a problem in rural counties because there just aren't jobs, but also in urban areas, where there's a high concentration of poverty," said Sharon Parks, of the Michigan League for Human Services, a research and advocacy group. "The economy just makes it incredibly difficult."

Also hobbling would-be workers are mental health and substance abuse problems, domestic violence

issues, lack of basic social skills and transportation, and illiteracy.

It's that last factor, the lack of the most basic reading, writing and math skills, that makes the challenges crystal clear for Stites.

The crux of the problem isn't skill training, it's a step before that -- getting clients' basic academic skills up to speed so they can simply qualify for skill training, Stites told lawmakers. He estimates that more than 65 percent of the people sent to his agency are illiterate.

Ken Walsh, executive director of the Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education, said the impact is statewide.

"This is very much a problem in terms of providing opportunities (for welfare clients) to complete their education," Walsh said. As a result, those people are essentially locked out of job training.

And while state budget cuts in almost any social services program hurt his clients, Stites zeroed in on the 70 percent cut over the past decade in state funding for adult education as being especially onerous. In 2001 state funding was \$80 million; today it's \$24 million. The hope for next year is just to maintain that level of funding.

The chances of someone getting the help they need are "devastatingly smaller" as a result of the cuts, Stites said.

Asked by Rep. Fulton Sheen, R-Plainwell, if his agency couldn't use literacy programs offered by churches and other volunteer groups, Stites said the need vastly outstrips the supply.

"I can fill up any vessel you can find," Stites replied.

Granholtz is counting on her Jobs Education and Training (JET) program to provide individualized training plans for welfare clients, including better screening programs to address specific barriers to employment, such as illiteracy. Currently operating in all major urban areas, the program will be statewide by October.

JET will cost about \$40 million this fiscal year, but is expected to save \$56 million in welfare payments, according to the Department of Human Services.

Preliminary DHS statistics show that in the four 2006 JET pilot sites (Kent, Sanilac, Oakland and Wayne counties), welfare caseloads are static or slightly declining. In areas without JET, caseloads are up 5 percent.

More information about JET is at www.michigan.gov/jet

Contact Sharon Emery at (517) 487-8888 x236 or e-mail her at semery@boothnewspapers.com.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
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April 10, 2007

Pontiac**Foster kids are at heart of exhibit****Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News**

PONTIAC -- A photo exhibit aimed at generating more interest in the thousands of children who are available for adoption will open tonight at the Pontiac Library.

The Michigan Heart Gallery features photos of children shot by local professional photographers who attempt to capture their spirit. The 42 children featured are considered potentially "hard to place" in an adoptive home, according to Regina Funkhouser, exhibit coordinator.

These children, along with 250 others who were not photographed, have been in the system longer than three months, are older than 10 and want to be adopted with their siblings.

"The Heart Gallery is an opportunity to plant seeds in people's minds," said Funkhouser, who works for the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, an information and referral service for prospective adoptive parents.

More than 3,000 Michigan children are available for adoption at any time in Michigan. Children who don't get adopted eventually age out of the system, and are at higher risk homelessness, unemployment and other social struggles.

"Their outlook is bleak," said Funkhouser.

Now in its second year, the gallery helped 14 children find homes last year. Eleven of the 42 children featured in the exhibit this year have been matched with prospective adoptive parents since the show opened in Lansing in January.

Four mini versions of the exhibit will be displayed at four Oakland Community College campuses this month.

If you go

The Michigan Heart Gallery exhibit will open from 5-8 tonight at the Pontiac Library, 60 E. Pike St.

A mini-gallery will also be on display this month at four Oakland Community College campuses:

Through Friday, at Auburn Hills

Through April 20, Waterford campus

April 16-20, Orchard Ridge

April 24-29, Southfield

See it online at www.miheart.org.

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Front Page



Sites of Interest

Final charges against Montmorency prosecutor dropped



News Photo by Ashley Bahling

Alpena Police Department responded to a two-car accident at the corner of State and Crapo streets around 5:10 p.m. Monday. The police didn't release any information on the accident.

By SUE LATUSZEK

The final two charges alleging professional misconduct by Montmorency County Prosecutor Terrie Case have been dismissed by the Michigan Attorney Discipline Board.

A written order by a discipline board hearing panel dismissing the charges of obstructing another party's access to evidence and requesting an individual other than a client to withhold relevant information was filed last week. Five other charges were dismissed by the board during a grievance hearing in January.

"It's certainly made things very stressful for the past year," Case said of the charges, adding she is happy to be rid of that cloud hanging over her head.

Case said due to the time frame in which the grievance was filed — approximately one month after she announced her candidacy for probate judge in 2006 — most people didn't believe the allegations and dismissed the issue as political.

A formal complaint was filed with the Michigan Attorney Discipline Board in July 2006 against Case, alleging she attempted to intimidate former Kent County Department of Human Services employee Darlene Rynkowski through a letter to Rynkowski's supervisor.

Case wrote to Andrew Zylstra, Rynkowski's DHS supervisor in Kent County, in August 2005 regarding Rynkowski's alleged interference with an embezzlement investigation against Gerald Cumper and Jerry Fletcher, which was later dismissed.

According to the letter, Rynkowski contacted the prosecutor's office, law enforcement officers and DHS workers and threatened lawsuits for their involvement in removing several adults from Cumper's care. A prosecution expert testified at the January grievance hearing that the letter from Case was appropriate, given the circumstances.

The opinion of the discipline board stated Case wrote the letter in response to Rynkowski improperly cloaking herself in the authority of the DHS and threatening other Human Service employees with whom she disagreed.

"Prosecutor Case took her responsibility very seriously to assist the Montmorency Department of Human Services office and removing developmentally disabled adults from very deplorable living conditions," the opinion stated. "It was her role as prosecutor to be their advocate and assist the Montmorency Department of Human Services. For Prosecutor Case to be found in violation of



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ethical standards by reporting this information would have a chilling effect on the professionalism and leadership of prosecutors around the state."

Either the grievance administrator or Rynkowski may appeal the decision to the full attorney discipline board within 21 days. If the board upholds the panel's decision, an appeal may be made to the Michigan Supreme Court.

"It wouldn't surprise me if she did (appeal)," Case said. "But the decision will be the same as the panel's. I'm not worried about it."

Sue Latuszek can be reached via e-mail at slatuszek@thealpenanews.com or by phone at 354-3111 ext. 341.



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Published April 10, 2007

Teen to be tried as adult in foster brother's death

Ingham County prosecutor plans to seek first-degree murder charge

Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

A 15-year-old boy is being charged as an adult in the shooting death of his younger foster brother, prosecutors said Monday.

What's next

- A preliminary hearing for Thomas Joseph Mack, 15 - who is charged with murder in the shooting death of his 14-year-old foster brother - is scheduled for Monday. The hearing determines if the case advances to trial.
- Prosecutors plan to seek either first- or second-degree murder charges. A first-degree murder conviction carries a mandatory sentence of life in prison. Second-degree murder is punishable by life in prison or any term of years.

Ingham County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Linda Maloney said her office will seek a first-degree murder charge against Thomas Joseph Mack of Lansing. In the alternative, he would be charged with second-degree murder, she said.

Daniel Brock Austin, 14, was killed in the shooting. A funeral was held Monday afternoon in Marcellus where his biological grandparents live.

Mack was ordered held without bond at the Ingham County Jail. He previously had been held at the county youth center.

Three boys - all foster brothers - were in an apartment at 319 E. Hillsdale St., Lansing, when the shooting happened shortly after 3 p.m. April 3. The boys were at the home of a relative of their foster parents, police said.

Neighbors believe the shooting may have happened after a fight or argument between the boys. Daniel was shot in the face, said his aunt, Carol Creger of Zeeland.

Daniel attended Dwight Rich Middle School.

A crisis team was available to students Monday when they returned from spring break. School officials say they also plan to send a letter to families about the incident.

Creger described Daniel as an active boy who had a difficult childhood.

He suffered from attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and possibly bipolar disorder, she said.

Daniel, who was born in Allegan, lived in several different homes after his mother died of unknown causes in 2003, Creger said. Creger said Daniel and his grandmother found his mother's body in a car parked in the driveway.

Daniel then lived with two different relatives, but neither could care for him because he required constant care and supervision, Creger said.

About two years ago, Daniel was placed with St. Vincent Catholic Charities' foster care program. Creger lost track of him after that.

A spokeswoman for St. Vincent Catholic Charities could not confirm or deny if the agency had been involved, because of confidentiality issues.

Creger said her nephew's death resulted from someone's irresponsible act.

"I question the choice made in leaving the kids home with an unlocked weapon," she said.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

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Clay Twp. man charged in 11-month-old daughter's death

April 10, 2007

ASSOCIATED PRESS

A St. Clair County man has been charged in the 2003 death of his 11-month-old daughter.

Anthony Joseph Rizzo, 31, of Clay Township was arrested by Michigan State Police as he walked out of a gas station in Shelby Township on Monday, the Macomb Daily reported.

Rizzo was charged in U.S. District Court in Romeo with felony murder, second-degree homicide, manslaughter and first-degree child abuse. A not guilty plea was entered on his behalf in court. He was being held in the Macomb County Jail without bond.

Oakland County Medical Examiner Dr. Kanu Virani said Kala Faye Kacarka of Algonac died from blunt force head trauma, adding that the child had severe bruising about the face and head.

Dr. Daniel Spitz, the Macomb County medical examiner, said he looked at the autopsy findings and talked to prosecutors as to why someone hasn't been charged in the death. Spitz said more work done by police in recent months turned up enough evidence to move forward with an arrest.

Rizzo and Kacarka's mother, Tracey Ann Kuhr, were with the child in a drug store July 8, 2003 when she began having breathing problems, police said. The child was rushed to Mt. Clemens General Hospital and then to Children's Hospital in Detroit, where she died.

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Mom set sex price for girl, state says

Jailed woman could lose parental rights

April 10, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The price for a 7-year-old girl's sexual innocence?

At least \$3,000.

That was what a 33-year-old Taylor woman thought she could get from selling pornographic pictures of her 7-year-old daughter, the second youngest of the woman's five children, according to a petition filed to terminate the woman's parental rights.

The petition filed by state Child Protective Services worker Sarah Davidson was to be the subject of a juvenile court hearing Monday. However, the case was adjourned until Friday because the jailed woman was not brought to court by Wayne County sheriff's deputies.

The Free Press is not naming the woman to protect the identity of her children. She is in jail in lieu of a \$1-million bond, pending a preliminary examination Thursday on charges including using a computer for child sexually abusive activity and distributing child sexually abusive material.

Sheriff's deputies arrested the woman March 30 at a Romulus hotel. They said she had brought her daughter and a bag of sex implements, expecting the girl to be abused by a man she had met through the Internet. The man was an undercover deputy.

Police went to the woman's home and found her four other children -- a 12-year-old boy and his sisters ages 6-11 -- with a 41-year-old man who allegedly is their father. All of the children were placed in foster care.

The woman was arraigned April 1 in 34th District Court in Romulus. Thursday's preliminary examination will be in 31st District Court in Hamtramck, where the sheriff's Internet crimes unit is located.

According to Davidson's petition and police, the undercover officer contacted the woman through an advertisement she posted online.

In an exchange of e-mails that began about three weeks ago, the woman sent a picture of herself that included her daughter. Inquiring about the girl, the undercover officer offered the woman \$25 to take a photo of the girl's face.

The woman then offered her daughter for sex, according to the petition, but the undercover officer said he didn't want to have sex with a child. Then the woman asked what someone might pay for pornographic pictures of her daughter and was told maybe \$3,000 to \$5,000, the petition said.

The mother said "she would bring sex toys for the adult male to penetrate the child," the petition said.

After her arrest, investigators reported, she said she had performed oral sex on the girl about two years ago, but denied having any sexual contact with her four other children.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

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April 10, 2007

Man arrested in death of girlfriend's baby

Santiago Esparza / The Detroit News

ROMEO -- A 31-year-old Clay Township man is in jail this morning on charges he beat his girlfriend's 11-month-old daughter, which led to the girl's death.

Undercover troopers with the Michigan State Police Richmond Post were monitoring Anthony Joseph Rizzo when they arrested him about 7:20 a.m. Monday at a gas station at Auburn and Ryan roads in Sterling Heights.

Also on Monday, Rizzo was arraigned in Romeo District Court on felony murder, second-degree murder and first-degree child abuse charges. He is jailed without bond.

The child, Kala Faye Kacarka of Algonac, was with Rizzo and her mother, Tracey Ann Kuhr, on July 8, 2003 at a Washington Township drug store. She suffered breathing problems and was taken to Children's Hospital in Detroit, where she later died, according to a State Police press release.

The Oakland County and Macomb County medical examiners agreed that the child was a victim of child abuse and that homicide was the cause of death, said State Police Trooper Christopher Tuckey, who is assigned to the Richmond Post.

Investigators never dropped the case and about five months ago it came up for review. Tuckey reinterviewed the people connected to the case, which led to the arrest and charges. The Macomb County prosecutor's office was involved in the decision to look at the case again, Tuckey said.

You can reach Santiago Esparza at (313) 222-2127 or sesparza@detnews.com.

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April 10, 2007

Teacher pleads in sex sting

International Academy instructor believed he was soliciting boy online, but it was deputy

Charles E. Ramirez / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- A teacher at the International Academy in Bloomfield Township pleaded guilty Monday to child sexually abusive activity for arranging a meeting with what he thought was a 14-year-old boy he met online.

Richard Joseph Krisniski, 47, of Troy pleaded guilty Monday before Macomb Circuit Judge Diane Druzinski under an agreement with Macomb County prosecutors.

In exchange, prosecutors dropped two charges of using a computer to commit a crime.

Under the deal, Krisniski had to tell the court about how he committed the crime.

"I was exchanging e-mails and instant messages with an individual who was portraying a 14-year-old boy," he told the judge.

"We started with discussions about his situation and then the conversation got sexual and I got him to meet (me)."

The felony charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in jail and a fine of up to \$100,000. Krisniski is scheduled to be sentenced May 15. Officials with the Prosecutor's Office said the computer crime charges will be dropped at his sentencing.

William Harding, chief of the Internet and ID Theft Unit, said the plea deal also calls for Krisniski to serve his sentence in state prison rather than county jail.

"The guidelines for (child sexually abusive activity) allow for serving sentences in county jail and we've asked that he serve his time in a state prison," he said.

Krisniski, who is married and has two children ages 15 and 17, was arrested by Sheriff's deputies on March 13 after trying to solicit sex from who he thought was a 14-year-old boy.

The man had been exchanging e-mail and instant messages with the "boy" -- who was really an undercover officer with the Macomb Area Computer Enforcement Team -- since Feb. 19, police said.

Krisniski initiated an online chat with the "boy" and arranged to meet him to have oral sex, according to police.

Deputies arrested Krisniski -- an English teacher at International Academy for the past 20 years -- when he arrived at the arranged location.

He has been suspended from his job; under state law, teachers convicted of felony sex crimes are not allowed to teach again. Officials at the academy could not be reached for comment Monday.

"When I arrived at the meeting place, I got out of my car, but then I changed my mind," Krisniski told the court. "When I attempted to leave, I was arrested in a sting operation."

Krisniski continues to be held at the Macomb County Jail on a \$100,000 bond.

You can reach Charles E. Ramirez at (586) 468-2905 or cramirez@detnews.com.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Prosecutor: Man preyed on girls with favors, threats

Women testify against convict accused of 1990 rape

Tuesday, April 10, 2007

BY ART AISNER

News Staff Reporter

For years, authorities say, Randall Raar lured children, particularly young girls, to his homes by promising them the chance to play in swimming pools, climb cherry trees and get candy rewards for completing odd jobs.

And for at least two girls, the friendly encounters eventually turned into repeated sexual assaults at the threat of violence, a prosecutor said Monday at the onset of Raar's trial in Washtenaw County Circuit Court on two counts

of first-degree criminal

sexual conduct involving a

then 5-year-old Ypsilanti Township girl.

"This case is really about the strong preying on the weak and an adult preying upon a child," Special Assistant State Attorney General Douglas Baker said. "He has a powerful attraction to and lust for children and has a particular way of satisfying that lust."

Raar is accused of raping the 5-year-old in 1990 after moving to Ypsilanti Township following his release from prison in an earlier child

molestation case.

The victim in the earlier case, who is now 37, testified Monday as the prosecutor attempted to establish a

pattern in Raar's behavior. That victim, who was 8 at the time the assaults began, said Raar often used a cherry tree in his yard to entice her and her younger brother from their grandmother's neighboring yard in Lincoln Park.

She said that for five years Raar offered her alcohol, drugs and frank instruction on sexual performance. A

recovering alcoholic, she said she spent years in

therapy because of the abuse and referred to Raar as the devil while testifying.

Raar, 59, served three years of a maximum 15-year sentence he received for third-degree criminal sexual conduct in 1984.

The pattern virtually

repeated itself in 1990, Baker said, when Raar lived with another convicted child

molester in a home along Tuttle Hill Road in Ypsilanti Township that had a large, above-ground swimming pool.

The local victim said Raar placed a handgun on a

bedroom dresser and told her to do what he wanted or her parents would be hurt. During her tear-filled testimony, the 21-year-old nursing student said she is still in counseling for the abuse and other assaults she endured by a teenage male baby sitter.

Investigators stumbled on to the recent case while canvassing Raar's old neighborhoods during a child-pornography probe that began last April.

Last month a Wayne County jury convicted Raar on 21 felony counts related to the child pornography investigation. Sentencing is pending.

Members of a multi-jurisdictional police force, acting on a tip from a prison employee, found thousands of images of child pornography during a raid of Raar's Lincoln Park home last April.

There was little discussion of that case before jurors Monday. But Raar's attorney Lynn D'Orio did not hide his prior conviction, insisting he paid his dues for "relationships" with young girls.

D'Orio said Raar is the victim of circumstance because he lived with a convicted child molester and was wrongly accused of molestation by irate neighbors once they learned of a police investigation.

"This did not happen," D'Orio said repeatedly. "(The victim) had a horrible childhood, but it wasn't because of anything to do with Randall Raar."

The trial resumes today and is expected to last at least through Thursday.

Art Aisner can be reached at aaisner@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6823.

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Monday, April 9, 2007

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Bill protecting the innocent from sex offenders should be approved

Web-posted Apr 9, 2007

EDITORIAL

State Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, hopes to introduce legislation in the next week or two that would help protect innocent victims from convicted criminal sex offenders.

Basically, the law would prohibit certain sex offenders from accessing "social networking Web sites" such as MySpace.

Advertisement

It also increases the penalty from misdemeanor to felony for registered sex offenders who violate reporting requirements.

We hope the four-bill package will be given smooth sailing through both the House and the Senate, and ultimately become law - the changes are badly needed in the ongoing fight against sexual predators.

The bills, which have not yet been assigned numbers, would require convicted sex offenders in the state to register with police their Internet e-mail addresses, user names and the social networking Web sites they use.

State law already requires convicted sex offenders to register their addresses and other personal information with police in their communities.

Requiring them to also register the additional information so they can be tracked on the Internet is a natural extension of the existing law.

The state, under the proposed legislation, would be required to notify social networking sites if a registered state sex offender is a member.

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Failure to comply with the new regulations would result in additional felony charges against registered sex offenders. Under current law, any violation of the sex offender registration act is a felony, except in the case of failure to report their addresses. Felons convicted of sex crimes already must report their addresses to police departments four times each year. Those convicted of misdemeanor sex crimes must report their address to police annually.

Anyone on the list must report a new address to police within 10 days of moving.

However, if they currently don't report their addresses, the charge is a misdemeanor. The new bills would make that charge a felony.

Unfortunately, as spokesmen for Law pointed out, history has shown that offenders have taken advantage of the current misdemeanor exception.

Recent newspaper reports indicate that 24 percent of Michigan's registered sex offenders don't adhere to the reporting requirements and aren't where they're supposed to be.

That's more than 9,000 of the 38,936 who were listed on the state's registry of criminal sex offenders in 2006.

The proposed bills make sense because there is no cure for pedophilia, and we do not lock such predators away for life.

If we can't cure the people who would abuse our children, and we don't put them away forever, we need to know where they are at all times - including in the virtual world of the Internet.

Law admitted he doesn't expect much action on these bills until the Legislature resolves its severe budget problems.

However, when the proposals do garner discussion in the House, he says he doesn't expect any opposition.

We hope he is right.

The Internet has become the newest playground for sexual predators and, consequently, it's a particularly dangerous playground for our children.

We need to do everything possible to protect people, particularly youngsters, from these high-tech villains.

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Indiana court reverses juvenile penalty over MySpace postings

CHARLES WILSON*Associated Press Writer*

INDIANAPOLIS — A judge violated a juvenile's free-speech rights when he placed her on probation for posting an expletive-laden entry on MySpace criticizing a school principal, the Indiana Court of Appeals ruled.

The three-judge panel on Monday ordered the Putnam Circuit Court to set aside its penalty against the girl, referred to only as A.B. in court records.

"While we have little regard for A.B.'s use of vulgar epithets, we conclude that her overall message constitutes political speech," Judge Patricia Riley wrote in the 10-page opinion.

In February 2006, Greencastle Middle School Principal Shawn Gobert discovered a Web page on MySpace purportedly created by him. A.B., who did not create the page, made derogatory postings on it concerning the school's policy on body piercings.

The state filed a delinquency petition in March alleging that A.B.'s acts would have been harassment, identity deception and identity theft if committed by an adult. The juvenile court dropped most of the charges but in June found A.B. to be a delinquent child and placed her on nine months of probation. The judge ruled the comments were obscene.

A.B. appealed, arguing that her comments were protected political speech under both the state and federal constitutions because they dealt with school policy.

The Court of Appeals found that the comments were protected and that the juvenile court had unconstitutionally restricted her right of free expression.

There was no number for Shawn Gobert in publishing phone listings. The Associated Press left a message seeking comment Monday at Greencastle Middle School.

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The County Press

Cops target deadbeats

by SUSAN YOUNGER
staff reporter

Officials say those who skip out on child support payments should consider themselves warned—support your children or spend time in jail.

Local law enforcement throughout the county are supported by grant money and armed with arrest warrants to round up those who aren't paying their child support.

Friend of the Court Emil H. Joseph, Jr. told Lapeer County Commissioners Thursday he secured a \$14,000 grant to fund bringing the individuals to justice.

The effort is designed for law enforcement to concentrate their efforts on Friend of the Court warrants. It is projected that a minimum of \$1,000 will be collected on every individual taken into custody.

There are about 750 warrants qualified as being reimbursable from the bench warrant fund, said Joseph.

"We're putting them in groups," said Lapeer County Undersheriff Bob Rapson, who is coordinating the sweep. "The first group of 172, is for those who owe over \$10,000. Of that group, 61 individuals owe \$20,000 or more."

And the sweeps by Michigan State Police, Lapeer County Sheriff's Department, and the police departments of Lapeer City, Imlay City, Almont, Dryden Township, Metamora Township, Lapeer Township, and North Branch Police have begun. They're expected to last between three and six months.

"We will be making arrests, but we'd rather have the person come forward before that happens," said Rapson. "That's why we're letting people know about this."

Individuals who want to make arrangements with the Friend of the Court to resolve an outstanding warrant, prior to being arrested, should appear at the Lapeer County Friend of the Court, 255 Clay Street in Lapeer between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on work days. Individuals should bring cash to make an initial good faith payment, with a driver's license or a state issued identification, and employment information.

Joseph is also looking for new information on absconders who may have left the state.

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